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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.**

Laura Cordes, Director of Policy and Advocacy

**HB 5591 AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTHY TEENS**

Submitted to the Education Committee

Public Hearing, February 29, 2008

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, my name is Laura Cordes, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide association of nine community-based rape crisis centers in Connecticut. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services.

During fiscal year 2006-2007 CONNSACS' community-based program staff and volunteers provided services to 4,326 sexual assault victims and their families. Our member centers also provided risk reduction and prevention education to nearly 34,000 children and youth and to over 5,000 members of the general public and training for close to 2,500 professionals, including law enforcement personnel.

Sexual violence perpetrated by both adults and adolescents on young persons is a significant health problem for teens. Nearly twenty percent of the victims and survivors we serve are between the ages of 13-18. According to the Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM), adolescents are responsible for a significant number of rape and molestation cases each year. That is why the overwhelming majority of the education programs that our member programs conduct are geared towards children and teens and conducted in the classroom.

To create a world without sexual violence young people must learn how not to abuse or become an offender themselves, and how to recognize the signs of abuse. It is challenging work. Unfortunately, the community educators we support tell us that the teens they work with more often than not lack factual information about sexual health.

We see a great opportunity in **HB 5591 AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTHY TEENS** to improve the health of Connecticut's teens by narrowing the focus the proposed grant program to support programs that provide comprehensive, age appropriate, medically accurate information about sexual health.

It is our firm belief that comprehensive age appropriate, medically accurate information about sexual health is a tool fundamental to sexual violence intervention and prevention.

Many of the survivors of child and teen sexual abuse tell us that they simply did not have the words or knowledge to know that what their teacher, classmate or boyfriend was doing was wrong. Many survivors tell us that they since their communities were silent about healthy and unhealthy relationships, consent, respect, sexual health and abuse, that they had a much harder time disclosing the abuse they experienced to an adult or to the police. Many of them never did.

When young people can comfortably speak about sexuality with adults and understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy sexual interaction, they are more likely to identify sexual abuse and tell an adult.

We would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding our position or services. Please feel free to contact me online ([laura@connsacs.org](mailto:laura@connsacs.org)) or by phone (860.508.7367).

Thank you for your consideration.